

Submission to the Senate Inquiry

Australian Defence Force Property Divestment Program

Interim Submission on divestment of Lancer Barracks, Parramatta, NSW

Submitted jointly by the NSW Lancers Association and NSW Lancers Memorial Museum Inc.



Executive Summary

Lancer Barracks is not surplus Defence land. It is an active military, heritage, operational and commemorative precinct delivering ongoing value to the Australian Defence Force (ADF), veterans, emergency services and the broader Australian community.

The proposed divestment would result in:

- Loss of an operationally proven civil assistance and inter-agency security hub
- Displacement or effective closure of Australia's only dedicated armoured museum in Sydney
- Irreversible damage to nationally significant military heritage and memorial space
- Reduced Defence capability through the loss of Army Reserve, Cadet and recruitment infrastructure
- Foregone community, tourism and educational benefits in Western Sydney

The combined financial, heritage, security and capability risks associated with divestment substantially outweigh any short-term fiscal return from disposal. Once alienated, the strategic, historical and community value of Lancer Barracks cannot be reconstituted elsewhere.



1. Introduction and Statement of Significance

Lancer Barracks, located in Parramatta, New South Wales, is one of Australia's most historically significant and operationally relevant Defence sites. It has been in **continuous military occupation for over 206 years**, making it the oldest mainland military site in Australia still in active use. The Barracks has hosted British colonial forces, mounted police and successive Australian Army units, and has been home to the **1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers Regiment for approximately 135 years**.

The Barracks also houses the **New South Wales Lancers Museum**, Australia's only dedicated armoured and mounted warfare museum in Sydney, which has occupied the site for more than **60 years**. The Museum preserves a nationally significant collection (6,000+ items) including armoured vehicles. This includes two rare armoured vehicles that are veterans of WWII which served with the Regiment. In addition, there are unique weapons, uniforms, and memorial artefacts plus an extensive library (2,000+ items) of military books and training materials. This vast collection reflects the operational history of Australian mounted and armoured units from colonial service through to contemporary conflicts.

The **New South Wales Lancers Association** operates in close partnership with both the Regiment and the Museum. Together, these entities provide critical welfare and support to our veterans, preserve Defence heritage, and deliver tangible benefits to the local community through education, volunteering and tourism.

Lancer Barracks is not a static heritage precinct. It remains an **active Defence facility**, supporting Army Reserve headquarters, cadet organisations, specialist platoons, **recruitment activity**, civil assistance tasking and **inter-agency** cooperation. The site has played a key operational role in major national emergencies, including bushfires, floods and COVID-19 response operations, as well as national security events including the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

The proposed divestment of Lancer Barracks places at risk not only an irreplaceable heritage asset, but also an operational, memorial and community hub that continues to deliver value to the ADF, veterans and their families, and the broader Australian public.

2. Functions, Activities and Importance of Lancer Barracks

(NSW Lancers Museum, NSW Lancers Association and 1st/15th Royal NSW Lancers)

Function / Activity	What We Do	Why It Is Important
Active Defence Headquarters	Barracks accommodates Regimental Headquarters, Squadron elements, Sydney University Regiment Platoon, 203 Army Cadet Unit, and Army Recruitment	Enables ongoing ADF capability, leadership development, recruitment pathways and Army Reserve readiness
Civil Assistance Operations	Regimental HQ coordinated and controlled Defence support during COVID-19, bushfires and flood responses	Provides proven command-and-control capability during national emergencies and disaster relief operations
Counter-Terrorism and Security	Barracks used by Police as a training area, emergency anti-terrorism headquarters and accommodation for deployed response groups	Supports inter-agency operational readiness and national security outcomes
Olympic Games Security	NSW Lancers Museum ran security and communications operations during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games from the Barracks	Demonstrates Defence-community integration for major national events
Military Training and Capability	Regimental training conducted from Lancer Barracks for WWI, WWII, Vietnam War, Iraq, Afghanistan, Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands	Provides continuity between historic and contemporary ADF operational capability
Heritage Preservation	Museum preserves armoured vehicles, weapons, archives of over 8,000 items, workshops and specialist skills on site	Loss of the site would fragment collections and risk permanent loss of heritage capability

3. Risks of Divestment and Consequential Impacts

3.1 Loss of Operational and Emergency Response Capability

Divestment of Lancer Barracks would remove an established Defence and inter-agency operational hub with demonstrated capability in:

- Civil assistance and disaster response command and control
- Counter-terrorism readiness and police training
- Large-scale event security coordination

The site's proximity to Sydney, existing secure infrastructure and Defence-grade accommodation make it uniquely suited to rapid activation. Replicating this capability elsewhere would require significant cost, time and duplication.

3.2 Irreversible Heritage and Memorial Impacts

Lancer Barracks represents:

- Over **206 years of continuous military occupation**
- Approximately **135 years of uninterrupted Regimental presence**
- A **consecrated war memorial**, including the scattering of Regimental members' ashes on the Parade Ground

Divestment would sever the physical continuity that underpins both tangible and intangible military heritage. Once lost, this continuity cannot be recreated.

3.3 Infeasible and Unfunded Relocation of the Museum

The NSW Lancers Museum is not financially capable of funding relocation. Key risks include:

- No identified alternative site capable of housing armoured vehicles, workshops and secure weapons storage
- Fragmentation of collections across multiple locations
- Loss or deterioration of heavy vehicles and specialist equipment
- Inability to safely secure weapons collections in a non-Defence environment without prohibitively expensive upgrades

Relocation would likely result in a permanent reduction in national military heritage holdings.

3.4 Loss of Volunteers, Capability and Institutional Knowledge

The Museum and Association are sustained by skilled volunteers, many of whom are veterans. Divestment would:

- Separate the Regiment, vehicles, workshops and Museum
- Reduce accessibility due to the loss of public transport connectivity
- Lead to a significant decline in volunteer participation

This would result in the loss of specialised heritage, mechanical and military knowledge that cannot be readily replaced.

3.5 Security Risks to Collections and Public Safety

Opening the site or collections to general public access without Defence-grade controls raises serious concerns regarding:

- Security of weapons and sensitive artefacts
- Public safety risks associated with historic military equipment
- Financial infeasibility of required security upgrades

Current Defence stewardship provides security arrangements that cannot be economically replicated externally.

3.6 Diminished Community, Cultural and Tourism Outcomes

Lancer Barracks contributes materially to:

- Parramatta's cultural identity and historical narrative
- Education and public engagement with Defence history
- Local and state heritage tourism

The NSW Lancers Museum is the **most visited museum in Parramatta** and an active member of **Parramatta Heritage Partners**. Its loss would diminish Western Sydney's cultural offerings and the community's connection to Australia's military history.

4. Recommendations

The Committee is respectfully requested to note that the proposed divestment of Lancer Barracks would result in the permanent loss of Defence capability, nationally significant military heritage, and irreplaceable community value that cannot be cost-effectively or authentically replicated elsewhere.

Accordingly, this submission recommends that the Committee:

4.1 Recommend that **Lancer Barracks be excluded from the ADF Property Divestment Program**, recognising its ongoing operational, heritage, memorial and community functions and its continued relevance to Defence outcomes.

4.2 Recommend that the Department of Defence formally recognise **Lancer Barracks as a strategic Defence, heritage and civil-assistance asset**, rather than surplus land, with appropriate protections applied to reflect its unique status.

4.3 Recommend that Defence pursue **long-term Defence retention or protected tenure arrangements**, including options such as Defence stewardship, heritage protection overlays, or Defence-controlled leasing models that preserve operational control and security.

4.4 Recommend that no divestment action proceed unless and until:

- A fully costed, funded and practical relocation solution is identified for the NSW Lancers Museum, including armoured vehicles, weapons storage and workshops; and
- Independent assurance is provided, that heritage, memorial, security and volunteer capabilities will be preserved at no net loss to the Commonwealth or the community.

4.5 Recommend that Defence engage formally with the **NSW Lancers Museum, NSW Lancers Association, the Regiment, veterans' representatives, local government and heritage authorities** to develop a sustainable, whole-of-government solution that balances fiscal considerations with national heritage, Defence readiness and community resilience.

4.6 Recommend that the Committee recognise that divestment of Lancer Barracks would not represent value for money in the long term, and that the loss of strategic capability, heritage continuity and public benefit materially outweighs any short-term financial return from disposal.